

<b>MEETING</b>	Communities Scrutiny Committee
<b>DATE</b>	23 January 2025
<b>TITLE</b>	Climate and Nature Emergency Plan: Annual Report 2023/24
<b>REASON FOR SCRUTINY</b>	The Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28 – A Green Gwynedd
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<b>CABINET MEMBER</b>	Councillor Nia Jeffreys, Leader of the Council

## 1. Why it needs scrutiny?

- 1.1 The 2022/23 Annual Report was scrutinised at the Committee's meeting on 30 November 2023 before Cabinet approval on 19 December 2023.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 12 March 2024, Cabinet approved prioritising £1,640,495 of the climate fund for the following projects:
  - Green Fleet Plan - £1,048,400
  - Lighting Upgrades Pilot Scheme - £416,617
  - Heat Pumps Scheme - £175,478
- 1.3 In addition, the right to prioritise the expenditure of the remainder of the climate fund was delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Members of the Climate and Nature Board.
- 1.4 The scrutiny of the annual report will enable Committee members to receive assurances that arrangements are in place and that there is sufficient progress in realising a Climate and Nature Emergency Plan- 2029/30.

## 2. What exactly needs scrutiny?

- 2.1 The progress made to make the Scheme a reality.
- 2.2 What is the progress on the ambition of the Plan - 'Gwynedd Council will be net zero carbon and ecologically positive by 2030'?
- 2.3 What funding sources have been identified?
- 2.4 What are the next steps?

## 3. Summary of the key matters

- 3.1 The Climate and Nature Emergency Plan Annual Report 2023/24 in Appendix 1 seeks to provide an accurate and balanced picture of the progress made during the year to implement the [Climate-and-Nature-Emergency-Plan.pdf](#) (CNEP).

- 3.2 The Report states the levels of emissions and carbon sequestration (absorption) that Gwynedd Council was responsible for, which has been calculated based on data accredited by the Welsh Government Energy Service. Based on this data we know how much the 'gap to net zero' is and therefore how much more work lies ahead if we are to reach our target.
- 3.3 The Annual Report also provides evidence on how Cyngor Gwynedd has been implementing Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. The relevant information is in chapter 3 and then at the end of each of chapters 6 to 12.
- 3.4 By submitting the Annual Report to this Committee, the Committee has the opportunity to check if the report is accurate and balanced and not. It can also propose any amendments or corrections, all before the report goes to a meeting of the Council's Cabinet for adoption.
- 3.5 This Committee may also offer any ideas for further future actions based on the information in the Annual Report.

#### **4. Background and Context**

- 4.1 The Council adopted the [Climate-and-Nature-Emergency-Plan.pdf](#) (CNEP) following a Cabinet meeting on 8 March 2022. The ambition of the plan is "Cyngor Gwynedd will be net zero carbon and ecologically positive by 2030." "Responding to the climate change crisis" is also one of the Council's 8 Improvement Priorities within [The Cyngor Gwynedd Plan 2023-28](#)
- 4.2 The Climate and Nature Emergency Plan (the Plan/CNEP) outlines how we as a Council will adapt the way we work and deliver services to reduce our carbon emissions and increase carbon absorption capacity. It provides examples of projects we will be pursuing, their outline costs and the timeframe to deliver.
- 4.3 The Scheme became operational in April 2022 and the first annual report in place 2022/23 can be found [here](#).

#### **Main Issues**

- 4.4 Chapter 5 of the Annual Report provides information on the levels of emissions and carbon absorption for which the Council was responsible, and on the all-important figure, which is the remaining gap to reach net zero.
- 4.5 Carbon emissions from our procurement processes are currently based solely on expenditure, and this can paint a misleading picture of the true impact of our climate spending. Simply put, the more we spend the greater the emissions.
- 4.6 Cyngor Gwynedd's total carbon emissions, including procurement, fell by 16% between the baseline year 2019/20 and 2023/24. If we rule out procurement then the fall is 37%.

- 4.7 Looking at our carbon emission and absorption data, without taking into account procurement data, then our gap to net zero is 35% smaller in 2023/24 compared to 2019/20 and 1% less than 2022/23.

## **Funding the Plan**

### Income

- 4.8 At the Council meeting on 3 March 2022 it was agreed to create a £3m 'climate plan fund' through the one-time revenue bid process, for the purpose of implementing the CAHN.
- 4.9 In addition, Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 22 November 2022 to use £2.8m of its general funds to fund an investment scheme in solar PV panels on 54 of our buildings, with the revenue savings contributing to our savings plan.
- 4.10 A number of the other projects in the CNEP, such as the PV project above, contribute to financial savings for the Council as well as saving carbon emissions. As many of them are pilot projects we do not yet have a firm certainty of the figures, but for example the Green Fleet Plan is expected to result in savings of £603,000 over 5 years, and the Lighting Upgrades Pilot Scheme will result in £53,000 of revenue savings.
- 4.11 As the operating costs of the CAHN projects are so high it is absolutely essential to attract additional funding from external sources in order to augment the internal fund referred to above. The grant funding supports a large number of our projects – eg. energy schemes, fleet purchases, projects run by Gwynedd Nature Partnership.

### Expenditure

- 4.12 Up until the end of December 2024 £2,207,984 out of the Council's Climate Fund had either been spent or set aside to be spent. That leaves £792,015 remaining.

## **5. Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

- 5.1 Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 says public authorities operating in Wales have a duty to maintain and improve biodiversity and to encourage ecosystem strength.
- 5.2 The Welsh Government published a national biodiversity strategy, the 'Nature Restoration Action Plan' in 2015 which outlined the commitment to reverse biodiversity loss in Wales, with which there are 6 objectives for action. In order to comply with the duty of Section 6 public authorities must publish a plan of their own based on the Welsh Government's plan, and then the progress needs to be reported upon.
- 5.3 Cyngor Gwynedd has been updating our own Nature Recovery Plan during 2024/25 to comply with the requirements of the Act, but in the meantime we are reporting on our progress against the 6 objectives of the national Nature Recovery Action Plan

through the Climate and Nature Annual Report. The information can be found in chapter 3 and at the end of chapters 5 to 11.

## **6. Response to Additional Questions from the Communities Scrutiny Committee**

### **6.1 What has been done in response to the Committee's recommendations at the [30 November 2023](#) meeting of:**

- a) Receive the report recommending:
  - Information about 'Active Travel' should be added under Section 3 of the Report: 'Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016'.
  - Consideration should be given to modifying the display form of the information under the titles 'What we said we would do in 2022/23' and 'What we did' in Sections 5-11 of the Report for clarity to the reader.
- b) Recommending to Cabinet that the staff resource be considered to achieve the vision of the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan.

6.2 Recommendation 1 was realised above, and the final Annual Report was modified before being submitted to Cabinet for adoption.

6.3 Recommendation 2 was realised above, and a Climate and Nature Professional Trainee has been appointed as part of the 'Cynllun Yfory' graduates scheme and the officer has taken up their post since September 2024.

### **6.4 Is the Climate Change and Nature Board the best way to realise the achievement of the Plan?**

6.5 The role of the Climate and Nature Board is to provide strategic leadership in the field and also to scrutinise and challenge the development of the CNEP. Its membership includes the Cabinet Members over the most relevant areas of work including the Leader of the Council; Countryside and Biodiversity Champion; a member representing scrutiny committees; Chief Executive; Principal Officers over the most relevant areas of work; officers who are involved day in and day out with the CNEP projects. In addition to the scrutiny taking place through the Climate and Nature Board, some of the CNEP's projects are also scrutinised at departmental performance meetings.

### **6.6 What's the latest on the Green Fleet Plans, Lighting Upgrades Pilot Scheme and Heat Pumps Scheme following Cabinet's decision on 12 March 2024 to earmark £1,640,495 from the climate fund for funding?**

#### **6.7 Green Fleet Plan –**

At the end of December 2024, 70 out of 210 cars and vans were electric or hybrid (33%). Following success in attracting a £124,000 grant from the Welsh Government an order has been placed to purchase an additional 9 vans and 2 electric mini-buses which will reach us by the end of March 2025.

Work continues to weed out our vehicle numbers to reduce fleet size, and to reduce the amount of vehicle hires. It is not currently possible to switch our 4X4 and heavy

fleet to electric vehicles until we are confident that suitable vehicles are available. Nevertheless we are confident that we are keeping to the timetable to make the Plan a reality by its end date of 2029.

#### Lighting Upgrades Pilot Scheme –

Preparation of assessing the 6 sites that will be part of this project is currently taking place. The work will then go out to tender with a view to the work in residential home and leisure centres taking place in June and July, followed by the work in three schools being carried out over the schools summer holiday period 2025.

#### Heat Pumps Scheme –

One small change has been made to this pilot, which we believe strengthens it. It was originally intended to install heat pumps in two schools and one leisure centre but now we want to install them in one school, one leisure centre and one residential home. This will provide further scenarios and valuable experience before deciding how to continue work on the remaining Council estate into the future. This is a wider project than just installing heat pumps – additional work such as installing triple glazing, fixing asbestos problems, insulating the buildings and replacing lighting needs to be completed. Work is currently underway on the 3 sites with a view to being finished by the end of March 2025.

### **6.8 What is the ongoing programme of work and the timetable for delivering the projects?**

6.9 The programme of work and timetable for each project are included in chapters 7 to 13 of the CAHN, but there are also detailed project management programmes on a weekly project-by-project basis. The development of this work is being monitored by the Climate and Nature Board, and a number of the projects are also being monitored at departmental performance challenge meetings.

### **6.10 How much money has been spent so far to make the Scheme a reality?**

6.11 See 4.8 – 4.11 above.

### **6.12 Are there other projects being considered?**

6.13 Discussions have taken place during 2024/25 amongst officers and at the Climate and Nature Board to review the CNEP, with a view to publishing a revised version in early 2025/26.

6.14 Existing projects have been evaluated, all considered in the context of the need to continue, extend further, or wind down. There are also proposals to adapt some of the existing projects, such as creating a Tree Management Policy or having low carbon fuel options for a heavy fleet.

6.15 New projects are also being considered, such as encouraging active travel in the school catchment area and reviewing the potential to create heat networks, but it is

important to note that all new projects are considered in the context of the financial and human resources that would be necessary to make it a reality.

**6.16 Are there ideas that have been considered but decided not to develop them further?**

6.17 Some schemes, such as investing Council funds in creating solar farms, have been ruled out for financial reasons. Millions of pounds would need to be invested to create such farms and the cost is so high because of the cost of paying for the creation of a link between the farm and the National Grid. The Council would also not be allowed to 'claim the carbon credit' that would come from generating electricity in a solar farm and therefore will not be able to contribute to our own target of reaching net zero.

6.18 It would be easier to justify the expenditure if it were possible to build a solar farm capable of feeding electricity directly to one of the Council's sites, but unfortunately there is not enough land adjacent to our main sites (eg. offices, depot) to enable this.

**6.19 Are there improvements that can be made to meet the target of Net Zero Carbon that are not costly? What has been considered?**

6.20 There are certainly a large number of low-cost or no-cost options that have been considered, many of which have already been implemented, such as:

- Facilitating arrangements to recycle waste on Council sites and running campaigns to influence changing staff practice
- Using Climate Week Wales in November to share information on the steps the public, staff and members can take to reduce their individual carbon footprint
- Use Climate Week Wales to offer electric bike taster sessions, and encourage staff to take advantage of the Council's Green Bike and Car Schemes
- Updating the Climate and Nature on the Council's website and also creating a new section on the Council's staff intranet to share information, news and support that will hopefully lead to behaviour change
- Encouraging staff and elected members to complete the Climate and Nature training e-module
- We are already using remote energy consumption monitoring (M&T) methods to identify any accidental energy wastage, but we are also investigating other remote control methods using the internet
- A questionnaire is due to be circulated to gather information on staff commuting habits to work and to see what changes towards less polluting approaches would be possible to adopt
- Alongside the implementation of the Green Fleet Scheme there are plans to try to reduce business travel – ie. moving away from using personal cars towards using the fleet of electric vehicles

**6.21 Can we receive a list of the things that cause the largest proportion of carbon emissions within the Council and what is being done in order to reduce them?**

6.22 Chapter 5 of the Annual Report shows the Council's carbon emissions by category, and chapters 6 – 12 show what is being done to reduce them.

**6.23 How does the current financial situation affect the realisation of the Scheme?**

6.24 While a number of low-cost or no-cost schemes are being considered and implemented, the reality is that significant funding is needed to realise the necessary changes that are going to make the biggest difference. If we are to significantly reduce the carbon emissions from our buildings and fleets (the most polluting areas, after procurement) then we need an investment of millions. We have estimated that it would cost around £3.7m to switch lights across the Council estate to LED ones, but that should also result in around £500,000 of financial savings and a carbon saving of 524 tCO<sub>2</sub>e. A pilot scheme to install heat pumps at 3 sites costs £1,950,000, while one small electric van is £26,357.

6.25 While projects require significant capital investment in addition to what we as a Council can offer, it also requires revenue investment in order to carry out projects. Revenue funding is needed to retain staff who will be able to apply for capital grants in the first place, and then to bring those projects to life.

## **7. Consultation**

7.1 The 2023/24 Annual Report has been discussed and accepted by the Climate and Nature Executive Group (a group of officers across Council departments involved in the CNEP projects) and by the Climate and Nature Board.

7.2 Following comments from the Communities Scrutiny Committee the report will be considered by the Council's Cabinet before a final version is published on the Council's website.

## **8. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

8.1 Have you **included** residents / service users? If not, when and how do you plan to consult them?

8.2 The final Annual Report will be published on the Council's website after receiving Cabinet approval and we will share information about it to all members of the Council, and to Gwynedd residents and the public at large.

8.3 Have you considered **collaborating**?

- 8.4 Chapters 11 and 12 of the Annual Report report on work that has been undertaken in part by the Gwynedd Nature Partnership, a consortium of local organisations led by the Council. A number of other projects in the CNEP are being undertaken in partnership with others, such as active travel projects in collaboration with Public Service Board partners.
- 8.5 What has been done or will be done to **prevent** problems arising or getting worse in the future?
- 8.6 One of the founding principles of the CNEP is to try to prevent further increases in the average temperature of the planet and to limit global warming to "well below 2 °C" in accordance with the UN Paris Agreement. All of the plan's projects seek to stabilise or even reverse the chances that the current situation leads to further problems in the future.
- 8.7 How have you considered the **long term** and what people's needs will be in years to come?
- 8.8 As noted above, the basis of the CNEP is to try to prevent global warming problems from getting worse into the future, and while the Council itself has set a target to be net zero carbon by 2030 the Welsh Government has set a target for the whole of Wales to be net zero by 2050. The CNEP therefore also takes into account that changing the practices of Gwynedd residents and businesses will be long-term work beyond 2030.
- 8.9 The Annual Report highlights that the CNEP itself states that further work needs to be undertaken to incorporate projects that will help residents, businesses and communities respond to climate change that is already changing our landscape, such as the impact of flooding and extreme weather. Work is currently underway to review the CNEP and make any necessary adjustments so it is very likely that we will see additional projects in the future that will focus on helping Gwynedd residents adapt to the different needs over a long period of time.
- 8.10 To ensure **integration**, have you considered the potential impact on other public bodies?
- 8.11 A large number of CNEP projects are being planned or implemented in collaboration with other public bodies or with the voluntary sector and communities. See 8.4.
- 8.12 A number of local public bodies including Gwynedd Council are members of the Public Services Board and one of the three Wellbeing Objectives of the Gwynedd and Anglesey Wellbeing Plan 2023-2028 is 'We want to work together to support our services and communities to move towards Net Zero Carbon'. There is ongoing collaboration with other local authorities across north Wales, the Welsh



Local Government Association, the Welsh Government Energy Service, Transport for Wales which has resulted in collaborative planning and commissioning. A number of CNEP's projects are also dependent on successful collaborations with other partners, such as our biodiversity and land use projects in collaboration with the Gwynedd Nature Partnership.

## **9. Impact on Equality Characteristics, the Welsh Language and the Social Economic Duty**

9.1 An Equality Characteristics, Welsh Language and Social Economic Duty Impact Assessment on the Climate and Nature Emergency Plan was produced when it was adopted at the Cabinet meeting on 8 March 2022. This assessment is directly relevant to the Annual Report on the CNEP as well.

## **10. Next Steps**

10.1 Following discussion in the Communities Scrutiny Committee any comments the Committee has on the Annual Report will be brought to the attention of Cabinet. The Council's Cabinet will consider the Annual Report at its meeting on 11th February.

10.2 If Cabinet approves the report we will share publicity about it and encourage Gwynedd residents to take advantage of the opportunities to reduce their personal carbon emissions as well as help the Council meet our own net zero target.

## **11. Background Information**

[Climate-and-Nature-Emergency-Plan.pdf](#)

[Climate-and-Nature-Emergency-Plan-Annual-Report-2022-23.pdf](#)

## **12. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Climate and Nature Emergency Plan: Annual Report 2023/24